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# Advantages Non-native English Teachers Can Bring to EFL Classrooms

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## Abstract

*The relationship between native speaker and non-native speaker teachers is still a subject of much debate though strenuous attempts have been made in recent years to deny the existence of differences between them. Probably, there may be some key differences between native and non-native speakers as teachers. This article, however, will address a number of advantages that non-native speaker teachers can bring to ESL/EFL classrooms.*

In the prevailing market-driven educational systems, where institutions are competing for students, the presence of native-speaker teachers often appear to be an important marketing tool. The trend being so, it might appear rather unconvincing to some to talk about the strengths and classroom worthiness of non-native English teachers in English language teaching. The fact that native English teachers are highly valued in ELT is not at all surprising, as they have a certain instinctive feel for the language that probably cannot be acquired by non-native speakers. They certainly do have a feel for its nuances, are comfortable using idiomatic expressions and, above all, they speak the language fluently.

To avoid misunderstanding and confusion regarding the aim of this writing, it may be prudent to state clearly from the beginning that the purpose of writing this article is not to compare native speaker teachers and non-native speaker teachers regarding their quality of teaching. The main objective, however, is to help the learners of English – our students – to be able to see their non-native teachers of English from a true perspective. In other words, it is an attempt to correct the thinking of some students who are under the illusion that nothing much can be learnt from a non-native speaker teacher – the students who are not only unaware of the contributions non-native teachers are making in ELT but also underestimate their strengths. In fact, *it no longer makes any sense to differentiate between the native speaker and the non-native speaker.* ( Swales, 1993: 284).

There are many ways in which non-native teachers are at an advantage in teaching English. Phillipson (1996) considers nonnative-English-speaking teachers to be potentially the ideal ESL teachers because they have gone through the process of acquiring English as an additional language. They have first-hand experience in learning and using a second language, and their personal experience has sensitized them to the linguistic

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and cultural needs of their students. Many nonnative-English-speaking teachers, especially those who have the same first language as their students, have developed a keen awareness of the differences between English and their students' mother tongue. This sensitivity is an invaluable asset as it gives them the ability to anticipate their students' linguistic problems.

Medgyes (1992: 346-7) also points out that nonnative-English-speaking teachers can be good learner models, having gone through the experience of learning English as a second (or third or fourth) language. They have had to adopt language-learning strategies during their own learning process, most likely making them better qualified to teach those strategies and more empathetic to their students' linguistic challenges and needs.

Undoubtedly, non-native teachers bring to their class an understanding of culture other than the mainstream American or English one. This will enable them to be more aware of the various cultures that are present in the classroom and also to help them ease the students into appreciating and understanding the culture of countries other than their own.

Another advantage is that the learners can look upon their non-native teachers as one of them which increases their motivation. In other words, when learners have moments when they feel that learning English is very difficult or even impossible, they will see their non-native teachers who are a reminder that English can be learned and mastered.

To conclude, bias against non-native teachers has no justification. Qualified and trained non-native speaker teachers can contribute in meaningful ways to the field of English language education by virtue of their own experiences as English language learners and their training and experience as teachers. One can easily notice in this writing that no discussion is made regarding the roles of native-speaker teachers in ELT. Suffice it to say that they can make a marvellous contribution to English language teaching provided they have the required teaching credentials.

#### References

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